

RED-CROSS KNIGHTS OF THE SALVATION ARMY.

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BY "FIDELIA."

After referring to their evident good-will and friendliness, the writer goes on to say:—

"More vulgarity, which cannot but be slightly shocking to persons of fastidious taste, we pass by as a trifle. But it is not so easy to get over the shock caused by the very unceremonious way in which these men speak of the most sacred things and names, and their free and easy manner of addressing the Deity. We have sometimes felt so strongly on the subject as to doubt whether the term religious can with justice be applied to the proceedings of the Salvationists. One trained to pious reverence in word and act cannot but ask himself, when he hears and sees these men or reads some of their printed words, 'Is this religion at all?' We must confess, however, that it becomes necessary to modify one's judgment respecting Salvationist irreverence when one sees it near enough. It must be frankly and fearlessly and very closely looked at, and when this is done, it is seen, we venture to think, not to be essentially irreverent. The apparent familiarity, the free-and-easiness with which these men address the Deity, appears to us to result from their extraordinarily vivid realization of his continued presence. Ordinary worshippers only approach God occasionally, and when they do so they feel it a solemn thing to enter his presence, and accordingly a thing not to be done without due ceremony. The Salvationists, so it seems to us, in all their proceedings never for a moment lay aside their consciousness that they are in the immediate presence of the Deity. They never enter his presence because they never quit it."

These quotations are given at some length, because they show "the homogeneous nature of the movement and the similarity with which it strikes observers on the opposite sides of the globe. Certainly one of its most marked characteristics is its uncompromising opposition to what Dr. Robertson Smith calls "a too prevalent way of thinking, which is certainly not biblical, but which leavens almost the whole life of modern times, and has accustomed us to regard religion as a thing by itself, which ought indeed to influence daily life, but nevertheless occupies a separate place in our hearts and actions." With them all life belongs to God. Love to Him is their motive power in all spheres of action. Nothing is to be common or unclean," and all things, great or small, are to be done with a view to his glory. It is the same thought that Jean Ingelow expresses when she sings:—

"Far better in its place the lowliest bird
Should sing to Him aught the lowliest song,
Than that a seraph strayed should take the word,
And sing His glory wrong!"

But it is time that something should be said as to their modes of working. Their meetings are of various kinds, those which the converts hold specially for worship being of a very quiet character and often very solemn. But all are alike distinguished by absolute unconventionality, which is with them a protest against formalism and its chilling, and deadening influence. When they first "attack" a place, the attacking force usually forms a procession, large or small, as the case may be, and marches to the place of meeting, playing musical instruments, if they have any, singing if they have none, and thus compel the notice of the passers-by and attract them from curiosity to come and hear what they have to say, which, whatever faults it may have, is sure to have the merits of directness and point. Circumlocution is as much at a discount with them as formalism, and this is one secret of their success.

Their ordinary meetings, held evening after evening, are, of course, not conducted on any fixed rule, although there is a general similarity. The presiding officer is usually a "captain," relieved by one or two "lieutenants," and these are, very frequently, young women. As a rule, they are active, vivacious, thrilling with electric energy and personal magnetism, and speedily make an impression even on the roughest audience. He or she is "all there," on duty with hand, voice, and mind, from beginning to end, acting as orchestra-conductor, chairman, prompter, and chief speaker, all in one. Beating quick time, with both hands, to the lively hymns and choruses, feeling the pulse of the meeting, ready with hymn or Bible, reading or prayer, as may seem at the moment most expedient, supplied with any amount of ammunition in the shape of appropriate impromptu remarks, hymns appropriate to each "testimony," or adroit admonitions when necessary, the "captain" walks up and down the platform, keeping an eye at once on the "soldiers" there and the audience below, and only sitting down for a few minutes' rest when relieved by a lieutenant, ready, however, to start up again, to all appearance as fresh as when the meeting first begun. A "parade" is frequently held before a meeting, when the "soldiers" muster, and after a short round of the streets, singing with great spirit, enter the "barracks" with drums, cornets, or tambourines accompanying the lively hymns. The place of meeting, called the "barracks," is usually a large plain hall, with benches filling up the body of the room, and a raised platform at one end filled with seats for the

converts or "soldiers," the "sergeants" in their neat red-brided uniforms occupy the front row.

When all are seated the "captain," in her trim uniform of navy blue and red braid, with a plain black broad brimmed bonnet, relieved by a small red band, with the words "Salvation Army" printed on it, opens the meeting by reading, with great distinctness, a hymn, verse by verse, which is sung by all standing. Before it is finished perhaps all the "soldiers" are kneeling, in which position they finish it. Then follows a prayer of intense feeling and often of great power, when perhaps another hymn, such as "Rescue the Perishing," is sung, still in the kneeling position, this being very peculiar and often thrilling in its effect. When the hymns are solemn in their character there is no drum or tambourine accompaniment, this being reserved for the lively hymns and choruses. A passage from Scripture is read at an early stage in the proceedings, which is followed by a very few appropriate remarks, and then come some of the more joyous songs and choruses, such as,—

"Oh, I'm the child of a King, I am,—
I am the child of a King;
Oh, it is, it is a glorious thing
To be the child of a King!"

or this,—

"Follow! Follow! I will follow Jesus,—
Follow! Follow! I will follow on,
Follow! Follow! yes, I'll follow Jesus,—
Anywhere He leads me, I will follow on!"

These sung rapidly, with the lively tambourine accompaniment, and sometimes clapping of hands, have an indescribably stimulating and touching influence. Another very sweet and more solemn chorus is this:—

"It's the Old Time religion,
It's the Old Time religion,
It's the Old Time religion,
And it's good enough for me!"

While a standing favourite, often repeated many times in succession with impromptu variations, has the answering refrains:—

"Oh, what will you do, brother, when He comes,—
When He comes?"

and

"Oh, the Army will be ready when He comes,—
When He comes!"

"Roll the Old Chariot" is another great favourite, there being a strong similarity between the Salvation Army choruses generally and the melodies of the Hampton College Jubilee Singers.

But the great charm of these meetings and that, indeed, which secures for them the perpetual freshness and attractiveness, keeping their halls filled, night after night, is contained in the personal testimonies of the converts as to the joy and strength which they have received in the "great salvation" from sin and its bondage. After the singing has had its effect both on the audience and the "soldiers," the latter are desired by the "captain" to "fire away," these testimonials being considered, in "Army" phraseology, the "red-hot shot," while the music, etc., are the "powder and cartridges." There is no false shame among the Army converts. Every soldier casts aside that, along with other fear, when he or she takes a seat on the platform. There are usually two or three on their feet, waiting their turn to speak. And they speak with a simplicity, directness, and force which evidently come from the heart, and consequently go to the heart. Each testifies to his gladness in "being saved," to his daily experience of the life-giving and strength-giving power of the personal Christ received into the soul; and simple and often rude and ungrammatical as the language is, there is the power about it that strength of conviction and intensity of feeling always supply. That young men and women but a short time before as careless or giddy, as reckless or dissipated, as any of their companions, should have the courage and power to stand up before a crowded assemblage of their own class, and declare what a change the accepted love of God has wrought in their own hearts and lives, appears to most of the hearers little short of miraculous; and when it is not a young man but an old world-hardened sinner who tells the story of this blessed change, the miracle seems even greater. "I once thought," a man would say, "that it would be utterly impossible for me to stand up and talk Christianity from this platform, but as soon as I had it in my heart I found I could do it at once." As all formality is discountenanced, the "soldiers" may be as unconventional in their phraseology as their hearts desire, and slang is often freely used by lips to which it is second nature in a way that shocks ears accustomed to hear religion talked only in decorous and refined language. Frequently a humorous remark, or an odd expression, will set both "soldiers" and audience laughing, and again by a sudden turn both will be touched almost, if not quite, to tears. As each soldier finishes his "testimony," it is usual for the captain to strike in an appropriate verse of a hymn in which all join, sometimes repeating a chorus over some eight or ten times, just as the impulse directs, while one or two more stand waiting to speak until the hymn is finished. There is no routine, and, within certain limits, variations are constantly occurring, so that at least there is no fear of monotony.

After the meeting has lasted for an hour and a half or two hours, the leaders and soldiers come down from the platform and kneel on the floor of the hall in a perfectly informal prayer-meeting for the salvation of souls. The bulk of the audience retires, and the captain and her lieutenants go about, talking earnestly to the more interested few who remain, and persuading one and another to take the decisive step of coming forward to kneel as a penitent confessing sin and asking for salvation, while, all the time, earnest prayers are being offered for their souls, in the most direct and simple phraseology. One peculiarity of the prayers of the "soldiers" as a class, is that they, like the French, use the conversational "You," instead of the less familiar "Thou," which Anglo-Saxon usage has almost invariably adopted in prayer. But after the first novelty has worn off, this does not of itself seem the least irreverent. These "after meetings" are the time when, in the "Army" phraseology, "prisoners are taken," and converts, by taking the step of coming forward, confess their faith and their desire henceforth to serve Christ. To some natures such an external register of an inward resolve is a great help, and certainly in the case of almost all the "Army's" converts, they henceforth are "not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto their life's end."

Such is a picture of one of their ordinary evangelistic meetings, and it is impossible not to see how true a knowledge of human nature has devised the *modus operandi*. The music and the hymns are just of the kind fitted to attract the crowds which fill their halls, and fitted also to touch and soften even the "roughs" who might otherwise give trouble, and who sometimes do in spite of all precautions. But it is seldom, indeed, that the ready tact of the leader is at fault in checking any incipient disturbance. With a few words, "Steady lads, back there!" in a tone of unquestioned command, or an appropriate verse or chorus of a hymn, the noisy spirits are speedily subdued, and occasionally the excitement from an attempt to get up a fig is calmed down by a variation of the familiar chorus already referred to,—

"There'll be no more fighting when He comes,—
When he comes!"

The leaders are trained from the first to expect and meet all sorts of unruly conduct in their rude audiences, and they meet it well.

Then, after the singing has had its due effect, and not till then, the most serious work of exhortation and testimony begins, always interspersed and varied with hymns before any tedium can possibly arise. And the perpetual variety and personality of the "testimonies" has the same advantage over more abstract exhortation that a personal story always has over general statements. Over the audience they certainly exercise a charm which accounts in a great measure for the Army's success. Those whose faces show that they are still held captive in the toils of open sin, come night after night, drawn by a fascination they cannot resist, and listen to the joyous testimony of some of their own late comrades, as if glimpses of a higher and purer life were dawning upon them, until perhaps, in some supreme moment of softening under the realization of an infinite love, they are led to come forward and take the step which surrenders their will to Him who has declared that the broken and contrite heart He will not despise. Tired women, heavy-laden with the burdens of life come and listen, through irrepressible tears, to the sweet tones in which they are so earnestly entreated to come to Him who will give them rest; and by degrees that rest steals like music into their souls, whether they come forward to the "penitent form" or not. Young lads come for an evening's entertainment, attracted by the brightness and "life" of the place, with the evident intention of having "some fun" in the stirring choruses and the speeches of the "boys" on the platform; but occasionally some chord that can respond vibrates to a random touch, and the thoughtless boy begins a new life, and becomes an earnest soldier and a Red Cross Knight. Even children come, drawn by the music and the simple rendering of the "Old, old story," new to many of them; and who can tell how their plastic natures may yet be moulded thus for time and eternity?

As for the "soldiers" themselves, most of them are, as has been said, faithful soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ. There is among them many a Dinah Morris as well as many a Seth Bede, although, of course, the intellectual and moral fibre are not often so fine as in George Eliot's gentle field-preacher. But if their purely intellectual knowledge is often small, their love and obedience are great,—a love and obedience not at all confined to the meetings, but influencing the whole of their work-day life. If their speech is rude and often "slangy," though, indeed, many of them speak with a power and propriety surprising in men of their class, their hearts at least are generally tender and true, and they speak in the strength of love. If there are many things that jar upon a reverent and cultivated Christian, it is easy to see that the irreverence is only apparent, arising from defective education, and that the most startling eccentricities which characterize their worship are, as has been well said by